As the only firm in Freetown with an office and a stock of capital in London, Macaulay & Babington came to monopolize the court. More than half of the 10,022 slaves freed between 1808 and 1817 had Macaulay or an employee as prize agent. This enabled the firm to “command Freetown’s economic life,” and for Macaulay to amass a private fortune. Many slaves freed by the court were pressed into military service, and Scanlan provides a rich description of life in the Royal African Corps.

The fourth chapter traces the conflict between Governors Columbine and Maxwell, the latter aiming to put slaves liberated by the Vice-Admiralty Court into military service. Maxwell militarized the labor of former slaves, putting farm workers in strategic locations and appointing officers to supervise children. He exploited a West India Regiment recruiting station at Bunce Island as an opportunity to exchange “surplus” captives for experienced, English-speaking veteran soldiers from the Caribbean.

The final chapter discusses the colonial response to the end of the Napoleonic wars. Prize money slowed and the legal basis for prosecuting foreign slave ships was more delicate, but liberated Africans kept arriving, and officials sought to turn former slaves into wage-earners, consumers, and Christians. Using the newly renamed Liberated African Department, Governor MacCarthy placed former slaves into villages that secured the colony’s expanding claim over the Freetown Peninsula. This expansion was a response to the loss of other trade opportunities, notably with British merchants in Senegal, and was supplemented in the 1920s with former slaves from the United States.

What would I have liked to see done differently? My answers here are largely driven by the differences between the goals, methods, and tastes of researchers in the social sciences and those in the humanities. First, there has been a renaissance of African economic history over the past decade, some of it published in this journal, but this book does little to engage with this recent literature. Second, there is little explicit discussion of sources or methods. Qualitative archival sources are quoted extensively, but it is difficult for the reader to know whether these are representative, or why the conclusions are more than impressionistic. Even given the same set of records, how are we to know if another researcher would have reached the same conclusions? Third, all causal and counterfactual claims are implicit. The reader is left with the impression of a colony founded to fight slavery that increased the amount of slavery in the world, but we are not given a clear picture of how different decisions would have led to different outcomes.

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The Economic Consequences of the War. West Germany’s Growth Miracle after 1945.
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Since the mid-1970s, German economic historians have been researching the history of the so-called “economic miracle,” that was the approximately three decades after WWII that were marked by remarkably high economic growth. It was and still is controversial whether the German economy after WWII has embarked on a new growth path,
possibly caused by the transition to a social market economy, or whether Germany has returned to a long-term unchanged development path. If this is the case, then the German economy would first have to show high growth rates because the growth rates during the war were comparatively low. After completing a reconstruction phase, Germany then returned to the path of normal economic development. In the present monograph, Tamás Vonyó presents diverse and convincing evidence that there was no economic miracle in Germany after WWII, but only a return to the established economic level and later growth path of the pre-war period.

Between introduction and conclusion, Vonyó develops his argument in five chapters. First, he examines the initial situation in the years 1945/1949. How did the capital stock and the standard of living develop during the war and in the immediate post-war period? It turns out that, despite bombardment and war destruction, the capital stock at the end of the war was larger and more modern than in the pre-war period (p. 20) and that well-trained workers were abundantly available in West Germany because many Germans fled from Soviet-occupied territories (p. 31). Only the destruction of the transport infrastructure and restrictions of the occupying powers initially prevented better use of existing resources. At the same time, the United States in particular contributed considerably to stabilizing the economy and society by supplying extensive amounts of food.

In the second chapter, Vonyó presents a very convincing and innovative study of the geographical dimension of economic development. In doing so, he works out that the supply of housing has been a central bottleneck factor for economic development. Vonyó makes a significant contribution to the literature with this convincingly substantiated thesis. So far, the literature has been dominated by the view that the existing production capacities remained partially unused as a result of the destroyed transport network and that the reconstruction of railway lines and inland waterways was a decisive factor for the economic miracle. Vonyó now shows that, over a long period of time, substantial investment in urban housing was necessary to get the economic miracle going. He also presents evidence that the numerous refugees living in the countryside have led to investments, that is, companies have not only been reconstructed in the established industrial centres, but have also been established in the countryside.

In the third chapter Vonyó draws up a growth balance of the German economy. Here he focuses on the industrial sector, for which he compiles figures for production, labour and capital input and from which he estimates the development of total factor productivity. On the basis of these calculations he also reveals the limits of growth. It has traditionally been stressed that investment has been a driving force behind the economic miracle and that this force was essential until the late 1960s. Vonyó sees the decisive turning point as early as the 1950s.

In the fourth chapter, Vonyó explores the international dimension and in particular the importance of the export economy for German economic development. Here too, he deviates from established narratives because he proves that the role of the export economy has not always been important, but has fluctuated in its significance. In the early years, the Marshall Plan period, the reconstruction of foreign trade relations was important. Subsequently, however, the domestic economy dominated and only after the founding of the EEC did a groundbreaking reorientation of German foreign trade
relations take place (p. 150). The fifth chapter examines four fields of economic policy (the new economic order of a social market economy, the Marshall Plan, fiscal policy and monetary policy) and their potential effects on economic growth. Traditionally, economic reforms and, in particular, the introduction of the DM have been considered to have a decisive effect. Vonyó sees economic policy more as an accompanying role and emphasizes the path dependencies on pre-war economic policy.

All in all, this is a very good and useful book. Vonyó sums up the extensive German-language literature for international readers very well and he also comes up with his own innovative interpretations. These are always based on intuitively plausible economic considerations and are underpinned descriptively and econometrically the extensive use of official statistics. To readers who are interested in the German or European economic history of the twentieth century I can definitely recommend this book.

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Societies have long made efforts to cope with economic insecurity as well as absolute poverty. George Boyer lucidly demonstrates in this masterful synthesis both the extent of these efforts and their limited success for Victorian and early twentieth century Britain.

His introductory chapter defines economic insecurity as the risk of economic loss due to such adverse events as unemployment, poor health, as well as risk of poverty in old age. The introduction also notes the recurring debate between those favoring compassion towards the poor and those arguing for personal responsibility and self-reliance in coping with poverty.

The book then turns to developments during the Victorian era in Britain. Despite efforts through the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 to encourage more self-help through personal savings and friendly society membership, outdoor relief remained important through the 1860s. Boyer maps out in considerable detail the importance of both outdoor relief and charity in relieving distress in manufacturing districts during the so-called “hungry” 1840s and during the U.S. Civil War induced cotton famine in Lancashire. During both episodes, the inadequacy of public poor relief led to an outpouring of private charitable activity to fill in the gaps. During the 1860s and 1870s there was a crusade against out-relief for the poor on personal responsibility grounds and increasingly successful efforts to deal with economic adversity through friendly society and trade union membership. The following two chapters consider unemployment trends and relief measures and the relation between old age and pauperism. Boyer finds that poor relief and other forms of government funding were major sources of support for the elderly during the Victorian era well before any sense of a welfare state.